

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BANGKO 19804 201130Z

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FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1544

C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 19804

DEPT FOR CAMP PENDLETON

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: SREF

SUBJ: CAMBODIAN REPATRIATES

REF: (A) STATE 223305; (B) STATE 218063; (C) STATE 2118111
(D) BANGKOK 19739

1. EMBASSY OFFICER AND CRS REPRESENTATIVE VISITED
ARANYAPRATHET SEPT 19 AND CAREFULLY INTERVIEWED
SERGEANT SUONG PENG WHO CLAIMS TO BE A SURVIVOR OF THE
GROUP OF FORMER KHMER ARMY TRANEES AT UDORN WHO
RETURNED TO CAMBODIA AFTER THE COMMUNIST VICTORY
THERE. SUONG PENG ALLEGES THAT THE UDORN GROUP MET THE
87 KHMER AIR FORCE OFFICERS WHO HAD COME TO CAMBODIA
FROM UTAPAO IN SISOPHON WHERE BOTH GROUPS STAYED FOR
FIVE DAYS UNDER HEAVY KHMER ROUGE SURVEILLANCE. (SUONG
PENG ALLEGES THAT HE RECOGNIZED A MAJOR KONG LACH IN
THE UTAPAO GROUP.) AT THE END OF THAT PERIOD 77 OF THE
UTAPAO OFFICERS WERE TOLD THAT THEY WERE TO BE TREATED AS
"PRISONERS OF WAR" AND THEY WERE TAKEN AWAY IN TRUCKS.
LOCAL VILLAGERS LATER TOLD SUONG PENG THAT THESE 77
OFFICERS HAD BEEN EXECUTED. SUONG PENG SAID THAT 10
OFFICERS OF THE UDORN GROUP WERE PICKED OUT FOR RE-
EDUCATION IN SIEM REAP. ON JUNE 18 SUONG PENG AND THE
REST OF THE UDORN-UTAPAO GROUP WERE TRANSPORTED BY TRAIN
TO PHNOM TIPADEI, 26 KILOMETERS SOUTHEAST OF BATTAMBANG
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PAGE 02 BANGKO 19804 201130Z

VILLE WHERE THEY WALKED TO THE VILLAGE OF PHUM HOAP,

ANOTHER 10 KILOMETERS AWAY. HERE THEY BEGAN A PATTERN OF WORK REPORTED BY ALMOST ALL REFUGEES FROM CAMBODIA. SUONG PENG ALLEGES THAT IT TOOK HIM 27 DAYS TO ESCAPE. HE SAID THAT 2 OTHERS STARTED OUT WITH HIM BUT WERE KILLED EN ROUTE. SUONG PENG'S FEET LOOKED AS IF THEY HAD BEEN SUBJECTED TO A GREAT DEAL OF FORCED MARCHING RELATIVELY RECENTLY.

2. SUONG REAP DOES NOT SPEAK EITHER FRENCH OR ENGLISH SO THAT HIS STORY HAD TO BE RECONSTRUCTED THROUGH AN INTERPRETER AT THE CAMP. THE EMBASSY OFFICER AND CRS REPRESENTATIVE CONCLUDED THAT IT WOULD HAVE BEEN IMPOLITIC TO PURSUE THE QUESTION OF HIS IMMIGRATION ON THE SPOT SURROUNDED BY MANY OTHER REFUGEES WHO ARE ANXIOUSLY AWAITING NEWS ABOUT THEIR OWN APPLICATIONS. HOWEVER, A UNHCR REPRESENTATIVE WAS IN THE CAMP REGISTERING NEW ARRIVALS. EMBASSY WILL LOOK AT SONG PENG'S APPLICATION TO DETERMINE WHAT HIS PREFERENCES ARE FOR IMMIGRATION, WHETHER TO THE U.S. OR ELSEWHERE AND WILL ADVISE. SUONG PENG IS IN VERY POOR HEALTH SUFFERING FROM MALARIA. HIS STORY CONTAINING MANY DETAILS SEEMED TO HOLD TOGETHER. SUONG PENG DID NOT ENQUIRE AT ALL ABOUT IMMIGRATION.

EMBASSY COMMENT: IN THE LIGHT OF REFERENCE (A) IT DOES NOT APPEAR THAT THE KHMER REPATRIATES AT PENDLETON WOULD BE PERSUADED BY FIRSTHAND ACCOUNTS BY THEIR COMPATRIOTS FLEEING CAMBODIA SINCE THE PENDLETON GROUP BELIEVES UNHCR SPONSORSHIP WILL PROTECT THEM FROM A SIMILAR FATE. REFERENCE (D) ANSWERS QUESTION (C) RAISED IN REFERENCE (A), I.E., THE RTG DOES NOT INTEND TO GET INVOLVED IN KHMER REPATRIATION PROBLEMS BUT WISHES THE UNHCR TO HANDLE THE MATTER EXCLUSIVELY. EMBASSY WILL SOUND OUT THE REGIONAL UNHCR REPRESENTATIVE IN BANGKOK ABOUT THIS PROBLEM AND WILL CONTINUE TO FORWARD REFUGEE REPORTS ON CONDITIONS IN CAMBODIA AS THEY BECOME AVAILABLE.
MASTERS

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